

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, May 8 – May 14, 2010

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2009 annual report) can be found on the FWP website.

NOTE: FWP has recently redesigned and reorganized its Website. The Wolf Program Home Page can be found at <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>. If you get an error page, go to the FWP Home page and look for Montana Wolves under Fish & Wildlife.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

The Montana Wolf Program 2009 Annual Report, FWP Quick Facts about the report, and a media release are available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>. The full report can be found by scrolling down the Wolf Program Home page to Reports // look for 2009 Annual Report or click on the photo link for 2009 Annual Report.

On 5/9, WS trapped 2 wolves at the south end of the Bitterroot. A black yearling male was caught and collared from the Trapper Peak pack southwest of Darby. Control is ongoing to remove this pack and the wolf was collared to help with these efforts, since there's no other collared wolves in the pack. A 2nd wolf was caught in the East Fork of the Bitterroot as part of control efforts to remove 2 wolves from the Trail Creek pack. The wolf captured was the collared alpha female, and since she was the only collar in the pack, she was released. Her GPS collar was removed and replaced with a VHF collar per FWP request.

Flights: Laudon flew north and west of Kalispell on 4/30 and in the Swan Range area on 5/12. Lance flew north of Helena to the E. Front / Augusta area on 5/12.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On 5/8, WS and FWP collared and released a wolf in the Benchmark area as part of the response to last week's confirmed depredation. It is unknown at this point in time if the collared wolf belongs to the Benchmark pack or even if the Benchmark pack was involved. WS and FWP will monitor wolf activity to gather more information on wolf and/or pack activity in the area. On 5/9, WS confirmed that a calf was killed by a wolf on private land southwest of Augusta. This is in the historic range of the Benchmark pack which remained uncollared at the end of 2009. Tracks of at least two wolves have been seen in this area during the winter and it is not known if the Benchmark pack still persists or

has denned. WS has been authorized to remove 3 wolves through trapping or by aerial gunning on the affected ranch to link the depredations and removals closely in space and time.

On 5/8 WS confirmed three calves as injured and 3 dead calves as probable wolf kills on private land south of Wisdom. One of the calves from the investigation on 5/8 that was injured has since died. On 5/10, WS confirmed 1 calf killed and 3 injured by wolves on the same ranch. WS will continue ongoing efforts to remove the Miner Lakes.

On 5/9, WS confirmed a cow had been killed by wolves between Dixon and Perma. This is outside of the normal home range of the Selow Pack. It is unknown if this is a new pack. Efforts to trap and collar are ongoing.

On 5/11, WS confirmed a calf as being killed by wolves on private land in the Mill Creek area of the Paradise Valley. This would be in the Mill Creek Pack's territory. A control action for 2 wolves has been initiated.

On 5/11, WS confirmed a calf was killed on private land near Helmville. On 5/12, WS investigated a second dead calf on the same ranch and determined it to be a probable wolf depredation. FWP authorized the removal of the remaining 2 members of the Elevation Mtn pack.

On 5/11 Wildlife Services trapped and killed a black male wolf from the Trapper Peak pack today southwest of Darby as part of ongoing work to remove this pack.

Outreach and Education

On 5/13, Sime and FWP R1 Wildlife Program Manager Jim Williams attended the Flathead Wildlife meeting in Kalispell. They gave a program about wolf management, delisting litigation, and the proposed 2010 wolf hunting season and quotas. About 45 people attended.

Research Activities

Nothing to report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

On 5/11, a large canine that had been reported as a possible wolf was killed when caught near livestock on private land between Hammond and Ekalaka in Carter County. FWP investigated after the incident was reported. FWP determined the animal was not a wild wolf and was of domestic origin based upon physical examination. Compared to a wild wolf it had a small head, small feet, and facial markings that resemble a domestic husky. More obvious, however, was that the fluorescent orange pet collar is not consistent with any collars placed on a wild wolf by FWP or USDA Wildlife Services. The nylon webbing collar with a snap closure and buckle is the type commonly found at any pet or feed supply store. FWP also concluded that even if it had been a wild wolf, the shooting would have been lawful.

On 5/11, a rancher near Helmville shot a black yearling female wolf from the Elevation Mtn pack that was harassing cattle on private land. FWP Warden Ezra Schwalm investigated and cleared the shooting as a legal take.

Other Updates

Northern Rockies Delisting Litigation in Missoula Federal Court

On 4/23, Judge Molloy announced a hearing date for oral arguments in the legal challenge of the USFWS decision to delist the wolf throughout the northern Rockies DPS except Wyoming. The hearing will be June 15 at 9:00am in the Russell Smith Courthouse in Missoula.

Background: Montana's interests in support of delisting have been represented and brought forward through efforts by FWP in consultation with the Montana Attorney General's Office. FWP filed its last written brief on 1/28. FWP argued that: 1. for a variety of reasons, it is lawful for USFWS to establish different levels of protection for a species, subspecies or Distinct Population Segment under the Endangered Species Act; 2. the facts show that Montana's existing regulatory mechanisms will keep wolf populations well above the federal recovery criteria and encourage connectivity; 3. sufficient genetic exchange has taken place and will continue; and 4. Montana's hunting season is not a basis for relisting the gray wolf.

FWP Proposes 2010 Wolf Hunting Season

FWP presented its proposed 2010 wolf hunting season to the FWP Commission on May 13. Prior to adopting a full tentative package for public comment, the Commission added three additional items for public comment.

FWP and the Commission request public comment on the proposed 2010 Wolf Season Elements and three different statewide Quota Alternatives (153, 186, 216). The Montana wolf population is predicted to decrease under each of the alternatives currently being considered by the Commission. All other season elements not specifically noted below are proposed to be the same as 2009. For reference, the 2009 Wolf hunting regulations may be found under "2009 Final Regulations" under Hunting/Regulations at the fwp.mt.gov website.

The public is asked to comment on the proposed changes from 2009 shown below (#1-10), the three statewide quota alternatives (153, 186, 216), any individual WMU quotas / subquotas, or any other concern related to this proposal:

Wolf season elements proposed for all quota alternatives include:

1. No trapping proposed for the 2010 season.
2. Licenses proposed to remain over-the-counter general sale to residents and nonresidents with total harvest controlled via required reporting of harvest by successful hunters.
3. Any licensed hunter may take only one wolf in the year.
4. Fourteen WMUs with two subquota areas are proposed.
5. An archery only season is proposed for all WMUs from September 4, 2010 until 20% of the WMU quota or subquota is met but ending no later than October 17, 2010.
6. A backcountry rifle season is proposed to run from September 15, 2010 until the WMU quota or subquota is met but ending no later than December 31, 2010. This backcountry rifle season is proposed for WMU 150, deer/elk hunting district 280 portion of WMU 290 (subquota of 3) and deer/elk hunting district 316 portion of WMU 390 (subquota of 3).
7. The general rifle season for all WMUs with remaining unfilled harvest quotas/subquotas is proposed to run from October 23, 2010 until the total WMU quota or subquota is met but ending no later than December 31, 2010. A December end date reflects intentional management protection during wolf dispersal in early winter months of January and February. The 25% quota cap on December harvest that was applied in 2009 is not proposed for 2010.
8. Any wolf license purchased during an open season is proposed to not be valid until 5 days from

the day of purchase. This would make the sale of wolf licenses consistent with the sale of bear and lion licenses in an Enforcement effort to address potential illegal harvest prior to license purchase (see additional justification provided).

9. Illegal harvest during the hunting season would count against the WMU quota.
10. Any WMU harvest over-run would be taken off other WMU quotas so that the larger area (northwestern Montana, western Montana and southwestern Montana) quota is not exceeded.

Additional details, such as the tentative distribution of the statewide quotas, can be found in the Interested Persons letter (see <http://fwp.mt.gov/Hunting>). Other background information, such as FWP's original proposal and analysis of various quota options can be found on the FWP Commission page by looking on the left navigation bar and then under Meetings (left navigation bar) and then Current Agendas (top of page): (<http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicnotices/notice.html?action=getPublicNotice&id=2377>). For further clarification, you may also call the Wildlife Bureau office at 406-444-2612.

To comment: The public can comment in person at one of 7 meetings to be held the evening of June 2. Written comments can be sent to: FWP – Wildlife Bureau, Attn: Public Comment, POB 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701. Electronic comments can be sent through the FWP Hunting page by clicking on the link Comment on Proposed 2010 Wolf Hunting Seasons Quotas and Hunting District Boundaries (<http://fwp.mt.gov/Hunting>). The comment period will close June 14 at 5pm.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

The Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board met on April 9th. The meeting was also broadcast on local access TV and streamed over the Internet.

The full agenda for this meeting is available at the Board's website www.llrmb.mt.gov. Look under Board and Meetings on the left navigation bar. The agenda and minutes from previous meetings are available at [Montana Department of Livestock](http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp). The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP online. Use the following shortcut link and be sure to update your bookmarks: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wolf>.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock death loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.